



Down to Brass Tacks

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BRASS TACKS INITIATIVE



CRG Co-owner, Todd Fischer at an AURI event, 2022. Image courtesy Todd Fischer

Business Spotlight: Cannon River Group

NEW PRAGUE COMPANY HELPS BUSINESSES CUT DOWN ON FOOD WASTE

The Minnesota-based company, Cannon River Group (CRG) has been in business for a little over three years but has already saved thousands of tons of food and packaging from going to the landfill. How do they do this? They work with those producing the food we all eat and show them alternative ways of using and reusing products that would otherwise go to waste.

Todd Fischer, co-owner of CRG, had 23 years of experience in the food industry before starting Cannon River Group (CRG). The idea for CRG came to Fischer while working for a larger food producer where he had the opportunity to be a part of an upcycling project – that is where the waste or by-product from one food is re-used in other ways rather than being sent to compost or even the landfill. In this case, the company had squash seeds that were the byproduct of processing squash puree. After processing, the company had no beneficial use for the seeds. Fischer and his team found that by slightly altering how the puree was processed, the seeds could be diverted and dried, turning them into a valuable, nutritional food source. Through this project, Fischer realized that food producers across the country had waste products that could be upcycled or at least handled more sustainably. “I started thinking about the need on a national level versus just the company I was with,” said Fischer, “Cannon River Group came out of that awakening.”

CRG’s goal is to eliminate the complexity of sustainability for food companies. “They have a lot to consider, I don’t think anyone would say ‘I don’t want to be sustainable’ but sometimes our customers don’t know where to start,” says Fischer. “There are so many *(continued on page 3)*

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BTI News

Organics Recycling Education

The prototype for the take-home kits is complete and has undergone the first round of testing thanks to Innovative Waste Recycling. IWR allowed us to hand out kits to families at their company party in January. Children at the party had fun using the coloring pages and families brought the rest of the kits home to use and learn together! After some adjustments with feedback from these families, the kits will be made available to the public through the Scott County Library System.



Children at the IWR company party coloring the "Ways to Reuse Food Waste" page from the take-home kits.

Volunteer Opportunities

We are seeking dedicated volunteers to help on the following committees.

- Marketing/Communications
- Development
- Outreach and Education

No experience necessary, training is provided.

If you are interested in supporting a sustainable food stream, contact Executive Director, Rachel Houck for more information at Rachel@thebrasstacks.org



Funding Opportunities

The following list of funding opportunities is provided for informational purposes only. The granting entities have no affiliation with BTI. For more information or to apply, please visit the granting entities' websites.

STATE

[Green chemistry and engineering internship grant](#)

Granting Entity: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Deadline: March 31, 2023

Funding: \$12,000

[Small business environmental improvement loans](#)

Funding Entity: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Deadline: N/A

Funding: Zero-percent interest loan amounts between \$1,000 and \$75,000

FEDERAL

[Rural Business Development Grant \(RBDG\)](#)

Granting Entity: United States Department of Agriculture

Deadline: February 28, 2023

Funding: No maximum. Smaller projects given higher priority

BTI Business Spotlight: Cannon River Group

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regulations when it comes to food, that decision-makers can get overwhelmed and decide to toss out the byproduct. This is where we come in.” CRG helps large food producers, from farmers to processors, to retail outlets (i.e. restaurants and grocery stores), understand how the whole part of the ingredients and byproducts they handle can be used. If it can’t be used for human consumption, it can often be used in other ways such as for renewable energy, feed for livestock, or as a soil amendment. “It still has value,” says Fischer. “It may be a ‘waste or byproduct’ to one company, but it still has nutritional value even if it isn’t consumed.”

Recently, CRG helped a food producer move large quantities of unusable dough into a soil health project. “The food wasn’t edible, but was beneficial from a soil perspective,” says Fischer. “We harnessed those nutrients and reinvested it into the earth to produce more food.” Like all new businesses, Fischer had to overcome a steep learning curve when starting CRG. “I think the scope of sustainability is so vast and truly understanding it just takes time, especially in the food-waste space,” says Fischer.



Pallets of canned goods waiting to be unpackaged and recycled. Photo courtesy Cannon River Group.

“There are so many different by-products and we had to learn what would fit and work best where. Then, also partner with the right like-minded individuals where needed. It takes time to build up those networks.”

Now that CRG has been in business for over three years, their network is all over the U.S. from New York to California and they are growing all the time. Not only are they regularly adding new clients, but they are always looking for ways to serve their existing clients better. “We are in a position to work with startup technologies to determine if, in fact, the technology they offer is a sustainable option. Many tech companies don’t have relationships with food processors, so they work with us to vet and go through a proof of concept for these technologies,” says Fischer. “But our primary focus is food producers. If the tech can help a producer reduce or eliminate waste, we want to explore that option.”

“Anyone can build something from scratch. People should start doing that.”

Fischer says to any business owner who wants to incorporate sustainability into their plan, “Do your best to understand the regulatory landscape, and don’t be afraid to ask for outside help from an expert. Just because it sounds like a good idea doesn’t mean you can do it.” He also says, “If someone feels like they have a good idea, they should pursue it without comparing it to others - social media makes it too easy to do that, but you will either get discouraged or your end-product will look like your competitor’s and not what you envisioned. Any person can build something from scratch. People should start doing that.”

For more information about Cannon, River Group visit [linkedin.com/in/toddfischer/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/toddfischer/) or email Todd@cannonrivergroup.com.

About BTI

The Brass Tacks Initiative is a 501c3 nonprofit founded on a mission to support sustainability in the food stream through research, education, and collaboration.

Our name comes from the phrase "let's get down to brass tacks." The phrase means to address the most important facts of a project or problem. The fact is food waste is a problem with environmental, economic, and social impacts. We believe the only way to make an impact on food waste is to **research** best practices and new methods of recycling, **collaborate** with the companies who are generating waste to find alternatives to the landfill, and make sure that current and future leaders are equipped with the **education** needed to make sustainable impacts in their community.

For more information about BTI visit our website www.thebrasstacks.org or contact us via email at info@thebrasstacks.org.